

# NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

*Protecting Parks for Future Generations*

**Testimony of  
Gene Sykes,  
Director and Chair of Board of Trustees,  
National Parks Conservation Association**

**Re: “The National Parks: Will they survive for future generations?”**

**before the  
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources  
of the House Government Reform Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**November 28, 2005**

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Gene Sykes, the current chair of the board of trustees of the National Parks Conservation Association.

Since 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System for present and future generations.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of NPCA and its 300,000 members, I would like to express my appreciation for your dedication to our national parks and your willingness to focus this subcommittee on delving into the issues that confront America as we strive to preserve our national parks and historic sites so that our children and their children may continue to enjoy them and learn about our heritage from them.

In 1915, Stephen Mather, a California native and the first Director of the National Park Service, hit upon a novel idea. “Why not get a group of influential people from various fields of expertise together, take them out in a national park, and gain their enthusiastic support for Congress to pass a bill creating a park service?” Mather chose Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks (then Sequoia and General Grant National Park) as his destination, and assembled a gathering of notables that included Gilbert S. Grovenor, director of the National Geographic Society, Emerson Hough, novelist, Massachusetts Congressman Frederick Gillett, and Ernest O. McCormick, vice-president of the Southern Pacific Railroad.

Mather’s “mountain party” spent several weeks hiking, camping, and exploring Sequoia and Kings Canyon “awestruck by the bold majesty of the vista.” And from the first moment these men entered Sequoia, the overwhelming beauty of that “sublime wilderness” touched their souls and converted each individual into an enthusiastic advocate for an expanded National Park System with a National Park Service to manage the lands. In no small measure, we owe the



1300 19<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036  
Telephone (202) 223-NPCA (6722) • Fax (202) 659-0650



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creation and growth of the “best idea America ever had” to “majesty” of Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks.

California’s national parks continue to inspire, not only with their vistas but also by the historic and cultural stories they preserve and interpret. For instance, some of the roads and trails that Stephen Mather’s “mountain party” traversed in the summer of 1915 were first laid down or maintained by a company of black soldiers from the 9<sup>th</sup> U.S. cavalry who patrolled the park in the summer of 1903. These Buffalo Soldiers were led by Captain Charles Young, the third African American to graduate from West Point in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Current day visitors to Sequoia and Kings Canyon can learn about the presence of black soldiers in the national parks prior to the establishment of a National Park Service, visit the General Sherman Tree, and see the same majestic sites that inspired Stephen Mather and Horace Albright back in 1915. Thus do California’s national parks sustain our long-standing, unbroken connection to the land and provide a rich legacy that we are obligated to leave unimpaired for future generations.

How sad it would be to squander our American birthright by failing to address the budgetary woes that threaten national parks in California and across the nation. Increases in the base operating budgets for California’s national parks between FY 05 and FY 06 averaged only 2.6 percent. During the same time the average rate of inflation hovered at 3.1%. Rising fuel costs, unfunded mandates such as cost of living adjustments, and other unexpected expenses, have eroded park budgets and undermined the ability of the Park Service to effectively manage and care for the natural and cultural resources placed in their charge. In terms of real dollars and actual spending power, most of California’s national parks have been sliding backwards for years.

### **The Wild, Wild West**

If Stephen Mather were to lead his “mountain party” on a 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary exploration of Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, what might he and his colleagues find? Possibly that the beautiful, clear vistas from 1915 had been clouded over by smog, confirming Sequoia’s place as one of the five most polluted parks in the United States. Venturing into the more remote areas of the park, Mather and company might encounter armed guards hired by drug cartels to cultivate illegal crops of marijuana. Suffice to say these are not the kind of national park “guardians” Mr. Mather originally envisioned.

According to NPCA’s 2004 *Faded Glory: Top 10 Reasons to Reinvest in America’s National Park Heritage* report, America’s national parks are in desperate need of increased funding. In addition to an annual funding shortfall in excess of \$600 million and a burgeoning maintenance backlog, national parks face a host of troubles from increasing crime to worsening road and trail conditions to the erosion of park facilities. California’s national parks are unfortunately not immune to the overall funding crisis. For example;

- At Death Valley only 37 percent of the historic structures are in good condition. That rating could, however, be outdated because 86 percent of the structures on the park’s List of Classified Structures have not had condition assessments since 1997.
- At Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks the Park Service is struggling to establish a transit system. Because of insufficient funding, however, the parks known as the



"smoggiest" in the country cannot yet offer this alternative form of transportation to park visitors.

- At Point Reyes National Seashore, more than 460,000 archival documents from the historic RCA transmitting station, used to contact the U.S. Pacific Fleet in World War II have yet to be catalogued and are not accessible to researchers or the public.
- Organized crime in the form of Mexican drug cartels has invaded Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks pitting Park Service personnel and unwitting visitors against armed men with AK-47s guarding illegal marijuana gardens.

Years of flat budgets for California's parks have led to crumbling infrastructures, an erosion of natural and cultural resources, the proliferation of invasive species, and an increase in clear and present dangers to public safety. Death Valley's 2004 operating budget of \$6.78 million was less than its 2002 and 2003 budgets and was more than \$10 million less than what it needed. The 2004, operating budget for Joshua Tree totaled around \$6 million from all sources, but the park actually needed closer to \$8.6 million to meet its needs.

As park managers do their best to manage an increasingly difficult and untenable position difficult choices must be made. To meet payroll, vital positions remain unfilled. Interpretive programs are cut and proper planning and care for park resources gives way to crisis management. We have, in fact, been short-changing our national parks for decades and the troubling condition of Yosemite, Sequoia and Kings Canyon, and Death Valley national parks are proof of the extent of our neglect.

Perhaps worse than the impact on our natural and cultural resources is the intangible negative effect of inadequate funding on what Horace Albright, the second director of the National Park Service, referred to as the "greenies." The career and seasonal rangers of the National Park Service that form the backbone of the agency and serve as the public face of our national parks. When park managers must furlough dedicated employees, pass along only the most meager of annual pay increases, and spread their remaining staff out in an increasingly thin green line, the morale of our national park rangers begins to plummet. No effort to save our national parks will be wholly successful unless it includes strong provisions that ensure the safety, well being, and adequate compensation of park rangers. As Albright once wrote,

To me no picture of the national parks is complete unless it includes the rangers, the "Dudes," the "Sagebrushers," and the "Savages." I like to picture the thousands of people gathered about the park campfires, asking questions of the rangers. In fact, I like to be at the campfire myself, and listen to the thousands of questions asked about the parks and their wild life. Especially am I interested in the replies of the rangers. These men have become keen students of human nature. In their brief, informal talks, they have learned to anticipate many of the questions of the visitors.

As we consider the future of our national parks we must concentrate on the issues of adequate funding and good management. For it is from these core foundations that the parks draw their ability to protect and enhance their resources and serve the public. Allowing our parks to be overrun by invasive species and drug cartels, or failing to provide support for Park Service personnel, constitutes an



embarrassing abdication of our responsibility to enhance and protect the common touchstones of our national heritage. We can and we must do better by our national parks.

### **California Desert Parks – Joshua Tree, Death Valley, and Mojave National Preserve**

Death Valley National Monument and Joshua Tree National Monument were established respectively in 1933 and 1936, to protect a special part of southeastern California where the Great Basin, Mojave, and Sonoran deserts converge. Both Death Valley and Joshua Tree were re-designated as national parks in 1994, with the passage of the California Desert Protection Act. Along with Mojave National Preserve, the California desert parks are home to nearly 500 vertebrate species, a host of rare and endangered plants, life and eco-system sustaining springs and seeps, and some of the most spectacularly rugged and beautiful landscapes in the United States.

Although the stark beauty of the parks may seem ancient and immutable, deserts are actually quite fragile ecosystems. Urban sprawl and development are taking their toll on California's desert parks as the region is being squeezed between southern California and southern Nevada; two of the fastest growing areas in our country. But, the health and well being of Death Valley, Joshua Tree, and Mojave National Preserve are being further undermined by a series of challenges directly related to insufficient funding.

### **California Desert Parks are Vulnerable to Crime**

Taken as a whole, California's desert parks comprise the largest concentration of National Park Service land outside Alaska. Unfortunately, Death Valley, Joshua Tree, and Mojave National Preserve, lack the necessary number of interpretive and law enforcement rangers to assist visitors, ensure visitor safety, and protect the park's cultural and natural resources from theft, vandalism, and poaching. As tight budgets force the parks to reduce staff, the vulnerability of these special places to crime increases.

Death Valley National Park has only 15 protection rangers, down from 23 a few years ago, to patrol 3.4 million acres of parkland; an area roughly equivalent to the size of Connecticut. The ranger staff at Joshua Tree has shrunk to ten. While hard-working Park Service personnel have uncovered and arrested organized cactus and archaeological artifact theft rings, staffing shortfalls and sporadic patrols allow for illegal activities such as the dumping of hazardous materials, damage to sensitive areas by non-authorized off-road vehicle use, illicit drug labs, and violent crimes. Park Service Law Enforcement Needs Assessment planning documents show that the three desert parks need to double or triple their law enforcement capacity in order to adequately address safety concerns and to prevent and detect resource crimes. Current budget allotments do not provide sufficient resource to achieve those goals.

### **Managing Natural and Cultural Resources**

Park Service personnel working at California's desert parks can be proud of the significant accomplishments made towards the management of the natural and cultural resources in their charge. At Joshua Tree, for instance, more than 50 species of native plants are grown at the Center for Arid Lands Restoration nursery and then used to revegetate portions of the park. Death Valley's wild burro removal program has reduced the numbers of this "introduced" animal from 1,500 to 200 – with many of the



burros being placed for adoption. And at Mojave National Preserve, Park Service staff have mapped and completed site records for more than 50 of the park's archaeological sites.

Yet, the needs of the desert parks are greater than the resources the Park Service has to deal with the myriad of threats and challenges they face. According to NPCA's 2005 State of the Parks California Desert Parks report, atmospheric deposition of nitrogen (from sources in the greater Los Angeles basin) at Joshua Tree threatens the ecology of natural lands by contributing to the proliferation of non-native grasses. This, in turn, has an adverse impact on the natural fire regime, resulting in increased fire frequency, intensity, and an altered eco-system.

At Death Valley, funds and staff are needed to support a number of cultural resource projects including archaeological surveys, historic structure stabilization, the identification and nomination of structures to the National Register of Historic Places, and museum object preservation at Scotty's Castle. Funds are also needed to repair a leaky roof and update old exhibits at the Furnace Creek Visitor Center. Superintendent J. T. Reynolds will be receiving NPCA's prestigious 2005 Mather Award for his strong advocacy of resource protection and increased funding at Death Valley.

Meanwhile, at Mojave National Preserve, none of the objects in the park's museum collection have been catalogued and a management plan needs to be put in place. Mojave would also benefit from the services of a term historian to complete historical research in order to provide context for mining, structures, and cultural landscapes. Mojave would also benefit, as would the other California desert parks, from a shared historic preservation crew to inspect, monitor and perform preventative maintenance on park structures.

Visitors to California's desert parks generated \$94.8 million in tourism revenue alone and supported 2,413 jobs in local communities in 2003. In addition, the parks serve as a major draw for retirees, working people, and snowbirds who settle in local communities and bring new assets with them. If parks aren't given sufficient funding to provide quality visitor experiences and protect our natural and cultural heritage, visitation levels and income from tourism will decline.

## **Yosemite National Park**

Horace Albright referred to Yosemite National Park as his boss' (first Director of the National Park Service Stephen Mather) favorite park. Budget constraints have, however, forced Yosemite managers to reduce staff and programming to a point where Mr. Mather's favorite park suffers from a pronounced lack of wherewithal. For example, over the last 5 years, the operational base budget of the Facilities Management Department at Yosemite increased from \$9,040,000 in FY99 to \$9,496,900 in FY05. In real dollars this \$456,900 "increase" spread over several fiscal years amounts to actual decrease in spending power. When the cost of uncompensated cost of living adjustment increases and the rising price of energy are factored in, Yosemite's base maintenance budget has eroded by approximately \$2,000,000 over the past six years. Such shortfalls mean that Yosemite can no longer afford to fill lapsed positions critical to the day-to-day management of the park. As a consequence, both park operations and visitor use and experience suffer.

## **Staffing Shortages**



1300 19<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036  
Telephone (202) 223-NPCA (6722) • Fax (202) 659-0650

Funding shortfalls have led to the elimination of several support and middle management positions in key areas of the park. The reduction of custodial staff by 5 positions has adversely impacted the ability of the park to keep its 89 public rest rooms, 10 visitor contact facilities, and 15 housing support facilities in suitable condition to ensure a good visitor experience. The frequency with which these facilities are cleaned has risen from twice a day to once every other day, or weekly.

Simultaneously, existing vacant positions remain unfilled in order stretch the park's budget. For instance, the historic preservation supervisor position is open meaning Yosemite has no one in place to oversee the building of comprehensive programs and plans for the restoration of the park's historic assets. Additional staff vacancies due to inadequate funding include the Branch Chief of Special Park Uses, Lands Program Manager, and the Administrative Support Assistant. In addition, 16 buildings and grounds positions, 12 road maintenance positions, and 17 utilities maintenance positions have not been filled in order for the Facilities Management Division to survive under the restrictive budget.

Yosemite has attempted to compensate by converting vacant permanent positions to permanent-less-than-full time or seasonal positions. Such a move allows Yosemite to use soft funds<sup>1</sup> thus somewhat easing the budget crunch. But it would also eliminate the ability to recruit or retain the best-qualified employees as well as inflict a substantial blow to the morale of career Park Service employees.

### **Interpretive Programs and Rangers Decline**

Despite the fact that Yosemite consistently ranks as one of the top 5 most visited national parks in the United States (3.2 million recreational visits in 2004), the number of interpretive rangers on staff at the park is at its lowest level in more than a decade. The decrease in interpretive rangers means fewer programs for the public, and the park has in fact reduced the number of popular ranger-led public education activities. In addition, five employees subject to furlough were furloughed for a longer period of time during the winter of 2005 than in years past. These staff reductions have resulted in a 50 percent reduction in overall interpretive offerings from the same period in FY03; roughly the equivalent of 6,500 visitors missing ranger-led evening programs over a six-month period.

Volunteers—not Park Service interpretive rangers—now provide the vast majority of Yosemite's interpretive walks. Although volunteers should be counted upon to provide service extension for the Park Service they ought never to be used to replace the career and seasonal rangers that have a special connection to their park. Even with the presence of volunteers, reductions in staffing at the park mean that far too often, special requests for interpretive programs cannot be accommodated.

Due to FY 04 budget reductions, about 20 interpretive media projects will either need to be contracted out or not completed. Approximately 2 million visitors will be affected by a lack of these projects, which include wayside exhibits, signs and other interpretive media.

### **Campgrounds and Trails in Bad Shape**

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<sup>1</sup> "Soft funds" refers to all funding except for Operation of the National Park Service (ONPS) dollars and includes fee demo and Yosemite Fund money that is project specific and cannot be used to hire permanent employees.



Limited staffing has led to a declining ability to maintain campgrounds and trails. Of the 800 miles of trails that make up Yosemite, only 25 percent receive trail maintenance in a “normal year.” However, in 2005, trail maintenance was limited to what could be accomplished using soft money such as repair/rehabilitation and Yosemite Fund projects. In addition, of the 14 campgrounds, 13 picnic areas, 51 acres of lawns, 7 amphitheaters and 15 landscaped areas, the only grounds maintenance that will be performed this year is picnic table replacement.

### **Cultural and Natural Resources Endangered**

Yosemite supports a diverse array of cultural and natural resources that are of global and national significance, ranging from the Yosemite Valley archeological district and cultural landscape to the Merced and Tuolumne Wild and Scenic Rivers to the federally endangered Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep. Many of these resources are at high risk—hundreds of historic structures require maintenance; water quality and air quality must be protected; exotic invasive species must be addressed, and endangered species, native plants, and other wildlife must be routinely monitored and managed; significant cultural resources must be protected; degraded ecosystems must be restored.

At \$1,300,000 a year, resource management funding at Yosemite constitutes less than five percent of the park’s budget. Most vacant resource management permanent positions cannot be filled, thus opening up huge gaps in staffing and coverage. Lapsed positions impacting the management of natural and cultural resources include the park historian, landscape architect, hydrologist, historic preservation specialist, and aquatic ecologist. Project specific dollars are now used to hire most of the staff on temporary subject-to-furlough basis but that has resulted in a short term staffing situation that has park professionals working on only very explicit issues due to soft funding constraints.

### **Law Enforcement Short-handed**

Yosemite is unable to provide adequate front-country or backcountry patrols to cover its 1,200 square miles. Normally, fewer than ten law enforcement rangers are on duty (1 ranger per 120 square miles). Yosemite rangers handle 6,000 law enforcement incidents per year, one of the highest caseloads in the National Park Service. Positions are greatly needed for increased road patrol, damn security, backcountry enforcement for watershed protection, and officer/visitor safety and protection of Yosemite’s resources.

Flat budgets, coupled with congressionally mandated pay increases, have led to staffing shortfalls over the last five years, demonstrated by an 18.75 percent or \$850,000 loss in staffing budget. As a result, no seasonal rangers are available to patrol the 320,000-acre Merced River watershed (the 430,000 acre Tuolumne watershed is patrolled on Hetch Hetchy watershed protection funding from San Francisco). These seasonal cuts have been made to accommodate non-discretionary spending on permanent protection division employees. In spite of these measures, the permanent ranger and fire staff has decreased by nine key law enforcement positions and essential fire positions.

Next year, cost projections reveal that Yosemite risks losing three dispatch positions and the ability to maintain a 24-hour a day dispatch operation. This means Yosemite will lose its 911 certification—a serious loss of visitor service and safety protection for rangers, fire fighters and



maintenance crews. Next year, Yosemite likely will also lose another four law enforcement rangers. Their structural fire protection force will furlough four structure fire engine captains to minimum six-month staffing—leaving the 12 park villages without year-round structural fire protection.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to these issues, Yosemite is now experiencing marijuana growing by organized Mexican crime families. While eradication numbers are still small (10,000 plants in 2004—an estimated street value of \$32 million), Sierra and Stanislaus National Forests—adjacent to Yosemite—eradicated about 68,000 plants in 2005: most of which were mainly found just across park boundaries. These growing operations constitute a clear and present danger to park staff, park resources, and park visitors.

Armed cartel members patrol the areas where the illegal crops are grown. They are known to set booby traps and in at least one instance, a fire set by a rival cartel burned thousands of acres near Groveland. Illegal marijuana growing spawns all manner of attendant criminal activity including poaching, the dumping of fertilizer into streams, and the spraying of insecticide in an otherwise pristine wilderness.

There is strong evidence that the profits from marijuana operations in Yosemite generate capital for the production of methamphetamines in the San Joaquin Valley. In other words, one of the country's best-known and most highly regarded national parks is now on the front lines of the battle against illegal drug use.

## **Redwood National Park**

### **The National and State Parks Partnership**

When Congress authorized a 58,000-acre Redwood National Park in 1968, it made provisions for accepting by donation the long protected and admired Jedediah Smith Redwoods, Prairie Creek Redwoods, and Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Parks. When the Park Service sought transfer of the three state parks in the early 1990s, however, the agency met with considerable local criticism. A 10-person review committee ultimately recommended the lands be co-managed by the Park Service and California State Parks in order that the resources of both could be utilized to protect and enhance the redwoods.

In 1994, the first in a series of formal agreements was signed calling for co-management the four parks as one unit known as Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP). Unfortunately, 11 short years later, this unique experiment at collaborative management is on the verge of failure. Budget shortfalls at both the state and federal levels have impeded the ability of

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<sup>2</sup> Yosemite has 1600 structures, of which 800 are historical buildings. The wilderness permits offices are run almost entirely on volunteers and interns—if lost, the ability to serve their current 111,000 wilderness use nights/year will be limited almost to the point of closure.



California State Parks and the National Park Service to fully invest in resource protection and enhancement. Redwood, instead of benefiting from a partnership between state and federal agencies, is now suffering from the worst of both worlds funding-wise.

Due to inflation and insufficient appropriations, Redwood National Park has experienced a staggering decline in purchasing power. Park managers have made plans for an even more bleak future. In 2004, Redwood created a Functional Plan to prepare for a 25 percent reduction in park base funds by FY 10. This emergency brake on spending has been developed to avoid the park finding itself in a "crisis situation."

In truth, Redwood is already in a crisis situation. The park's 2000 Business Plan, for instance, found that the 131.4 full time equivalent (FTE) positions in the park in FY 99 were inadequate to meet park needs. That report concluded the optimal number of FTEs for Redwood would be 199.8. Unfortunately, instead of making progress towards the optimistic goals, park managers have, by necessity, further reduced the number of FTEs to 100.85 for FY 04, half of what the park's business plan showed the need to be.

The budgetary bloodletting does not, however, stop there. According to Redwood's Functional Plan, projecting flat budgets over the next 5 years, the park anticipates cutting an additional 15.8 FTEs by 2010 and thereby operate at mere 85.1 FTEs. Thus, by 2010, RNSP will have 114.7 fewer FTEs than the ideal number articulated in the park's 2000 Business Plan. Resource Management and Science will bear the burden for many staffing cuts (6.4 FTEs) and will eliminate 2 branch chiefs, 4 geologists, and 1 fisheries biologist. Beyond ending critical ecological research, the park will be unable to complete management plans and environmental compliance documents in a timely manner. The impact of these cuts would be significantly magnified once the 25,500-acre Mill Creek park expansion occurs pending Congressional legislation to adjust the park's boundary sponsored by Senator Diane Feinstein (S. 136) and Representative Mike Thompson (H.R. 361).

The planned cuts for Facility Management, a reduction of 4.5 FTEs, undermine the ability of the park to manage day-to-day operations. Not only will Redwood lose facility management personnel to perform preventative maintenance for facilities and trails, but the park faces losing much of its ability to coordinate and utilize work crews from the California Conservation Corps (CCC), the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) and other volunteer groups. These volunteers perform important invasive plant removal and ecological monitoring projects.

Cuts to the Division of Interpretation and Education (2.3 FTEs) would mean that the park would be less able to provide educational programs park-wide, teacher workshops, training for seasonal and intern staff, and special request programs for educational groups. Park managers also predict that Redwood will be unable to maintain its two year-round information/visitor centers and would have to consolidate the Crescent City Information Center with the Del Norte County Chamber of Commerce by 2010.

The partnership forged between the Park Service and California State Parks at Redwood is proof that management of public lands by multiple agencies can work. Together, California State Parks and the Park Service have created new methods for jointly defending park resources, increasing cost efficiencies, and sharing expertise and assets. For example, the Park service was able to negotiate the



donation of 100 "THINK" electric vehicles from Ford Motor Company to California State Parks via the National Park Foundation. For its part, California State Parks provided their Aubell Ranch location as the site for relocating the Park Service's central maintenance facility at Redwood.

What should have been a fine example of a well-functioning partnership has instead become yet another glaring case of how acute funding shortfalls undermine the ability of park managers to effectively do their jobs. The relocation of the central maintenance facility to Aubell Ranch – California State Parks donated the land while the Park Service was to cover the \$14 million construction costs - has been postponed due to inadequate funding. In the meantime, the current facility is deteriorating and occupies a precarious position in an unstable, landslide prone area.

### **Philanthropy and Non-Profit Partners in Parks**

NPCA strongly supports the role of philanthropy in providing a margin of excellence in the national parks. National parks have accepted donations, gifts, and other expressions of philanthropic support since the birth of the National Park System in 1916. In fact, some national parks—including Acadia, Virgin Islands and Grand Tetons-- owe their existence to the generosity of philanthropists, and philanthropy today provides an indispensable role in the funding of many important projects in the national parks. Like philanthropy, partnerships between the national parks and non-government organizations in a number of parks play a vital role in helping enhance resource protection and visitor experiences. Philanthropic support and partnership agreements, however, should always be targeted at improving upon a core level of service and protection in our national parks. In no circumstances should philanthropic funds and partnership support be used or solicited as a replacement for federal support.

In recent years, most philanthropic funds have moved toward the parks via two avenues: the congressionally-chartered National Park Foundation, and through many dozen private friends groups such as the Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Grand Canyon National Park Foundation. The mission of these organizations is explicitly to provide prospective donors, including corporations and individuals, an avenue for donating to individual national parks. These organizations are important contributors to the parks, and have been successful at soliciting much-needed private financial support.

I raise this issue because in August 2005, the National Park Service issued a draft revision of the director's order providing guidance on the use and solicitation of philanthropic funds (Director's Order 21, or DO21). Though the draft provides helpful guidance and structure for park staff, friends groups and the national park foundation, the current draft in several ways broadens the opportunity for philanthropic solicitations by parks and others and raises the concern that parks may be poised at the top of a slippery hill. As the Park Service moves forward with this director's order, NPCA is especially concerned that conveying significantly more latitude to parks for direct fundraising -- from individuals, private philanthropies and corporations -- potentially risks positioning parks to begin the quest to fund base responsibilities with philanthropic funds. It is an unfortunate reality that this revision of DO21 comes at a time when parks are experiencing significant financial strains. (Research conducted by NPCA and the Park Service in nearly 100 parks nationwide reveals that on average, national parks operate with only two-thirds of the needed funding, a system-wide shortfall that exceeds \$600 million annually). While we applaud, in general, efforts to provide additional direction, structure and clarity to superintendents and others, we nonetheless urge very careful consideration of the costs and benefits to



Some of the areas where we especially caution the park service are the following:

1) as superintendents are given additional authority to directly solicit funds, efforts should be made to ensure that this added responsibility does not come at the expense of the success experienced by park friends groups; 2) as prohibitions are loosened to allow the broadest possible reach for fundraising, including the current policy barring solicitations to concessionaires, alcohol and tobacco companies, guidance to the field should be bolstered and well described to clearly identify that the intent is to provide additional latitude only in exceptional and unique circumstances that do not in any way sacrifice the image of the park service in the quest for additional financial support; 3) as the park service responds to friends group recommendations that more opportunities for donor recognition be provided, the service must enhance the consideration and approval process for donor recognition to fully ensure that the donor interests -- especially corporate interests -- for recognition on buildings, trails, interpretive materials and other both temporary and permanent venues to a level that avoids any hint or perception that the quest for additional funds is more important than the image and public value placed on the national parks as "commercial free zones."

Finally, we are concerned about language in the draft prohibiting park staff from portraying congress, the department of the interior, or the agency as "having failed in their responsibilities to fund parks." We do not see that there is any productive value in making this prohibition. Park Service personnel are deserving of the trust of the service leadership and of the administration to act appropriately and professionally at all times. We see no value in hiding in any way the reality of the financial stress that the parks are under.

### **Channel Islands National Park**

In addition to my position with NPCA, I also sit on the board of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) of California. In this capacity, I have become familiar with partnership efforts that the Conservancy has underway with the National Park Service at the Channel Islands National Park. For over twenty-five years, TNC has been working with the Park Service to restore and protect the resources of Santa Cruz Island, one of the five islands in Channel Islands National Park. Channel Islands have been called "the Galapagos of North America" due to the many native species found there and nowhere else in the world. Some of these species threatened, such as the Santa Cruz Island Fox. Following the transfer of 8,500 acres of its holdings on Santa Cruz Island to the National Park Service in 2000, TNC owned 76 percent of the island; the Park Service owned 24 percent. TNC's partnership with the Park Service on Santa Cruz Island exemplifies the importance of partnerships to protecting and enhancing natural habitats and native species in our parklands.

Such partnerships require that the Park Service be a strong player in such endeavours, dedicating the financial and human resources to make these partnerships work. Unfortunately, because of the Park Service's limited federal financial resources, TNC is bearing the brunt of the responsibility in preserving the unique ecosystems of the island for future generations. While Channel Islands National Park received nearly \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2002 through the Park Service's Natural Resource Challenge to help restore the native vegetation and wildlife on the island, this funding unfortunately was the exception, rather than the norm. This funding was not provided in subsequent years. Funding for the



Park Service's Natural Resource Challenge has significantly curtailed in recent years, hindering the Park Service's ability to be strong partners in places like Santa Cruz Island.

### **Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks Rising Costs and Shrinking Staffs**

Uncompensated cost of living increases for rangers and staff is of major concern. Although Congress has increased the budget each year, (in FY 03 and 04 the Sequoia and Kings Canyon budget decreased slightly) these small decreases and modest increases have not been kept pace with cost of living adjustment increases and inflationary effects. Therefore, to cover necessary pay increases, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks are forced to take funds out of the operating budget.

In FY 06, congress provided a 2.6% budget increase for Sequoia and Kings Canyon, an amount that falls short of both the 4% increase the park received in FY 05, as well as the 3.1% average rate of inflation. While the smaller budget increase did not provide funds to restore cut positions, it did allow the parks to continue operations without cutting additional staff. However, despite having more money, the Park Service is faced with covering base increase cost and inflation has eaten away from the budget. Now the potential for deep across the board cuts from the FY 06 operating budget threatens the delivery of many visitor services.

Due to the twin effects of covering cost of living adjustments and inflation, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks have been forced to cut 10 seasonal interpretive positions, three backcountry rangers, 10 maintenance positions and three resource positions. Additionally, Sequoia and Kings Canyon were forced to close three backcountry ranger stations—reducing the effectiveness of rangers to respond to incidents and provide timely resource protection. Currently, the safety officer position—which oversees the overall safety and compliance within the parks—has been vacant for over a year.

In some cases, permanent positions have been cut to fill critical seasonal positions. Overall, the inadequate budget increase is affecting the number of rangers, interpretive staff, patrol staff, bear experts, and maintenance workers which are vital to the safety of visitors and operational success of the parks.

### **Illegal Marijuana Cultivation is Damaging Our Parks and Risking the Safety of Visitors and Rangers**

As outlined in NPCA's *Faded Glory: Top 10 Reasons to Reinvest in America's National Park Heritage* issued in March 2005, marijuana cultivation managed by heavily armed Mexican cartels is taking place within Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks and on adjacent federal lands. This problem threatens park resources, visitors, employees and residents of adjacent communities. Many of the individuals engaged in these illegal activities carry high-powered firearms and fears persist that criminals will one-day use these weapons to injure or kill park personnel or visitors.

In 2004, over 44,000 marijuana plants were eradicated within the park. In 2005, however, only 1,351 plants were removed. This drop in the number of plants destroyed is thought to be due to three factors. First, the cartels have changed the way they grow their plants. Instead of growing large number of plants in a few areas, they are growing a small number of plants in a variety of areas. Second, instead



of growing crops in squares or rectangles shapes, the Cartels are now growing them along the contour of the terrain, making them more difficult to find.

But the third reason for a decrease in the number of destroyed plants is due to lack of funding. Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks have insufficient rangers to patrol the remote areas where these activities take place. In addition to an increase in rangers, the parks are in desperate need of increased helicopter patrol and surveillance time to help locate these hard to find growing areas.

As is the case with illegal marijuana cultivation in Yosemite, these growers are polluting rivers and streams with fertilizer, trampling delicate soils, disrupting natural drainage, piling trash, laying miles of irrigation tubing, and poaching wildlife – endangering much of the park's ecology. Without further investigation of marijuana activities within the Sequoia and Kings Canyon's boundaries, park resources, park visitors, and the safety of adjacent communities remain in danger.

Despite the FY06 \$448,000 budget increase for interdiction of illegal marijuana cultivation, the park still lacks money to restore the grower-damaged areas. Restoration of these areas is essential to the mission of the Park Service and prevents their ready reuse by growers in subsequent seasons. The Park Service has found that by completely removing components of drug infrastructure such as camps, fertilizers and pesticides stores; by restoring the natural landscape and posting bilingual warning signs about areas being under surveillance, the cartels do not return. Such campaigns are, however, both labor and resource intensive, and require increased funding to manage.

### **Less Than Happy Trails – The Maintenance Backlog Grows**

Sadly, only 20 percent of all roads, trails and utilities in Sequoia and Kings Canyon are up to acceptable standards. Throughout the park, campgrounds and buildings have improved slightly. However, this improvement is a result of Sequoia and Kings Canyon staff focusing their efforts on this problem, while shifting other issues to the back burner.

### **Class Dismissed**

Within the park, there is only one ranger available to work with school groups. Outside the park, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks serve less than 2,000 students in an area where hundreds of thousands of students who have never had exposure to the parks reside. An external education program is needed for area students, with a focus on young people who have never had an opportunity to visit a national park.

### **Golden Gate National Recreation Area**

Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) is one of the largest urban national parks in the world. Established in 1972, GGNRA was formed with the same mandate as Gateway National Recreation Area, as part of a trend to make national parks more accessible to urban populations. GGNRA includes San Francisco Maritime, the Presidio, Fort Mason, Muir Woods, Alcatraz, Fort Funston, and the Marin Headlands. GGNRA contains 75,398 acres of land and extends north from the Golden Gate Bridge to Tomales Bay in Marin County and south to San Mateo County, encompassing 59 miles of bay and ocean shoreline. The park receives 20 million visits per year.



Although Golden Gate is blessed with a number of diverse funding sources (building lease revenues and philanthropy contribute substantially to park's health) and strong park partners such as the Golden Gate Conservancy, GGNRA has nonetheless suffered from insufficient funding in recent years. The park's budgets for FY 02 through 04 were relatively flat. The increase in funding that came in the FY 05 appropriations bill helped to stabilize the downward trend, but while the subsequent FY 06 budget provides additional relief, the managers at GGNRA, like all park managers in the park system, are being told to prepare for as much as a 5 percent across the board cut – essentially a \$1 million reduction at GGNRA– that could mean the loss of as many as 15 FTEs in a park unit where every department is already thinly staffed.

Of course, GGNRA is a park that is fortunate enough to be surround by a relatively wealthy and interested community that is willing to pitch in and donate money and volunteer labor to address park needs. The park has partnered with the Golden Gate Conservancy on a volunteer trail maintenance program, planning for rehabilitation of the Presidio's native plant community, a replacement of a path in Muir Woods, and the restoration of Crissy Field. The GGNRA superintendent and the parks' partners should be credited with these and other many successful projects. But Golden Gate situation is unique among the Park System; it has the opportunity to tap into a city that is rich with philanthropists and thousands of people who generously offer their time and talent to support park operations and add value to existing park programs. Few parks in the country are situated near such a great source of private munificence. And, while clearly Golden Gate's partners have the potential and will to lend the park a hand, their generosity should not be mistaken for a desire to subsidize the park's basic operational responsibilities of park administration and management, resource and visitor protection, maintenance, and interpretation. The federal government has a responsibility to meet Americans expectations to fund our national parks at a level that enables them to achieve their grand mission of preserving parks unimpaired for future generations and serve as a leader in any partnerships that parks may develop to enhance existing park programs.

## Conclusion

The public love affair with national parks continues unabated. At Joshua Tree visitors flock to the Cottonwood Visitor Center even though this temporary facility has no exhibits. And at Sequoia and Kings Canyon visitation soared to 1,000,177 in 2004 despite the dangers related to illegal drug cultivation in certain areas of the park.

The men and women of the Park Service, the rangers, seasonals, and volunteers that keep the parks running continue their long tradition of providing unparalleled service to the visiting public. Park Service personnel at Joshua Tree made nearly 229,000 visitor contacts and offered 677 programs to nearly 20,000 students in 2004. Joshua Tree volunteers contributed more than 24,000 hours to the park assisting staff with a variety of task from the mundane to search and rescue operations.

From Cabrillo to Redwood people visit California's national parks to connect to a rich legacy of natural and cultural resources. From Point Reyes to Death Valley the Park Service does its best to fulfill its mission to serve as steward for our nation's heritage. Both the public and the Park Service are doing their jobs. The question before us today is can congress find the wherewithal to support in full measure the needs of a National Park System they had the wisdom to establish all those years ago?



National Parks Conservation Association  
Gene Sykes

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important series of hearings. I am happy to answer any question.



1300 19<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036  
Telephone (202) 223-NPCA (6722) • Fax (202) 659-0650



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